

Life is a roller coaster

Students across Britain are redefining love and friendship, thanks to the life-affirming message of **evaluate**. Clive Price reports on one of their school presentations

It's sex education – but not as we know it. Remember the days of the flushed, fumbling science teacher, duty-bound to share the facts of life with a classroom crammed with sniggering students? That's all gone.

In its place is a professional presentation – complete with multimedia, chat, drama, quizzes and games. What's more, it covers much more ground and tackles many of the 'hot issues' facing 11 to 13-year-olds today, while encouraging them to delay sexual activity until they are in a long-term loving and committed relationship.

Welcome to *This Is Your Life*.

Just one of the up-to-the-minute presentations from CARE's **evaluate...informing choice** schools programme, this looks at sex, drugs and alcohol – and the power of choice. Specially trained teams use plenty of fun and facts to capture the students' attention. Audience participation is key, as team members offer a fresh, modern and direct approach to what used to be called 'the birds and the bees'. It now carries a more holistic term – sex and relationship education – or SRE.

Healthy Choices

'We believe each person here in this room is unique and valuable,' said team leader Chrissy Bysh, opening the presentation. 'Each one of you is a one and only. That's why it's important you make wise and healthy choices.'

Around her was a small sound system, microphones, laptop, projector and screen. Introducing herself, Kev Nash, who is also working on a Primary **evaluate** resource for CARE, and Cliff from the Enfield **evaluate** team, she stressed they wanted to set a 'safe and secure' learning environment.

'We think what you've got to say is important,' Chrissy told the students. 'We're interested in hearing what you have to say.' A few ground rules were set – like no laughing

at each other but respecting one another. From then on, it was all systems go at this all-boys school in Buckinghamshire.

The very lively Kev talked about the beginning of life. 'Did you know that you are one in 250 million?' he told the group. 'You happened when just one sperm – out of a possible 250 million – fertilised just one egg.'

'The mathematical chances of you being you are astronomical,' he said. 'You are a winner. You were from the start – even if you may not feel like one. That one sperm travelled at speeds faster than a nuclear submarine, to fertilise just one of your mum's eggs. You are a living miracle.'

There was nervous laughter. It was all very upbeat and positive, as Kev ploughed on. He explained how life develops rapidly in the



evaluate presentations

- Just The One for Years 10 to 13 (14-18s)
- Sex:\How Safe? for Years 8 and 9 (12-14s)
- This Is Your Life for Year 7 (11-12s)
- All About You for Years 5 and 6 (9-11s)

womb – and how each baby has its own individual fingerprints and unique iris pattern.

'There's nobody on earth like you,' he added. 'There never has been, there never will be.'

Changing Pace

Chrissy introduced an activity. She asked the group to write down positive things about themselves. Within minutes she invited them to share what they'd come up with. There were some entertaining responses.

'I'm Ewan,' said one boy, 'I'm energetic, wise, artistic and beautiful!' The class roared. 'I'm Will,' said another, 'and I'm wicked, intelligent, likeable and loyal.' Finally, 'I'm Tom and I'm tender-hearted, optimistic and merry.'

Chrissy thanked them for their feedback. 'We live in such a negative world,' she said, 'it's good to be positive about ourselves.' The pace changed again with another activity – a dot-to-dot picture. Cliff spoke about growing up.

'When you were born, you were helpless,' he said. 'When the decision was made about your name, you didn't make that. But now you're getting older, you start to make your own decisions ... and choices have consequences.'

He brought in what became the hub of the session, the 'four Ws' of decision-making: who, where, what and why. 'Who influences our decisions?' he asked, as an image from the TV sitcom *Friends* appeared on the screen.

'When *Friends* first came on the TV,' he explained, 'there weren't places like Starbucks, Costa Coffee, Café Nero. But since we've had this programme, pretty much a whole coffee shop culture has developed.'

Chrissy addressed the 'image' culture. 'Whenever you buy a magazine,' she said, 'you open the pages and there's another fantastic shot of a film star or pop star and they just look absolutely perfect – but is it the real world?'

She showed the students how graphic designers can make photographs of people's faces look even better with screen-based airbrushing. 'It's impossible to live up to – because it's not real,' she added.

The Four Ws

- W**ho makes or influences my decisions?
- W**here am I going and how will I get there?
- W**hat are healthy and unhealthy choices?
- W**hy are my choices important?

Damage Health

'If we spend our lives trying to live up to the celebrities, trying to live up to what they look like, then it's impossible – because they're airbrushed to perfection.'

Kev took the theme to another stage, looking at life as a roller coaster. 'Life can be fun,' he said, 'it can also be scary.' He asked students to write down their high and low points from the last school year, inviting anyone to share them.

Some real challenges emerged. 'My high point is making loads of friends,' said one boy, 'my low point is breaking both my arms.' Rounding off the session, Kev stressed the importance of learning from all of life's experiences.

Dreams and ambitions were next. Cliff encouraged people to write down one long-term goal – along with how that might be achieved. 'I want to be in the army,' said one lad, 'and in the meantime I'm going to be an army cadet.'

Summing up the activity, Cliff came out with another impressive statistic. 'If we write down our goal,' he said, 'we're seven times more likely to achieve it. If we draw our goal, we're 700 times more likely to achieve it.'

The session went on to tackle behaviour that can damage our health – smoking, drinking and taking drugs. The **evaluate** team told

their young audience that each cigarette can take five minutes off a person's life.

When asked what makes people turn to drugs, the students came up with interesting explanations. Peer pressure, depression and boredom appeared to be the main causes.

Using drama and sketches, the team highlighted consequences of choices in a creative way. The message coming across was that there is a downside to every high. 'Be confident in standing out,' said Kev. 'Let's not be afraid to stand out from the crowd.'

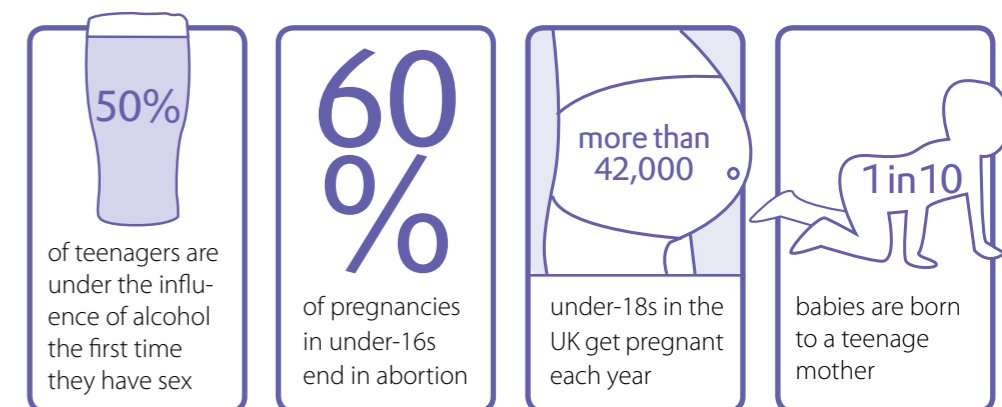
The presentation culminated in a talk on love and friendship. It featured comment about American pop band the Jonas Brothers, who are known for their views on chastity and abstinence. 'What is love?' asked Chrissy. 'Is it all about sex? Is it all about kissing? Or is it more than that?'

Students offered their definitions. 'Love is something beyond friendship,' said one. 'Love is about a relationship and keeping it,' said another.

At the end, the pupils filed out into the sunny playground. One of them stopped to shake each team member's hand, thanking them for their efforts.

It was as if he was representing his peers. Let's hope he was also representing his generation. For as many of them as possible need to hear the life-affirming message of **evaluate**.

Facts and figures



Action

- Visit the website - www.evaluate.org.uk
- Encourage your local schools to book **evaluate** sessions
- Consider starting an **evaluate** team in your area
- For more information contact **01525 375210** or email info@evaluate.org.uk



Inspiring the young: [left to right] Kev Nash, Chrissy Bysh and Cliff Wing